

VOYAGE OF SIR FRANCIS DRAKE.

DURING the fifty years immediately following the discovery of America, Spain gained a firm and lasting foothold in the New World. Ferdinand and Isabella, those Christian rulers who sat upon the united throne of Castile and Aragon, and freed their kingdom from the invading Moors and redeemed it from the faith of Islam, and under whose patronage Columbus sailed upon that voyage which revealed to an astonished world a new continent and a vast, unknown ocean, were succeeded in power by the mighty Charles V. Under the reign of this enlightened monarch, the most powerful, wise and enterprising ruler that ever sat upon the throne of Spain, that nation approached the zenith of its power, wealth and importance in the political affairs of Europe. This she reached and passed during the reign of his son and successor, the haughty Philip, whose power and magnificence was supported chiefly from the endless stream of treasure which flowed into the kingdom from conquered provinces in the New World or from the commerce of the East.

While other nations confined themselves to occasional voyages of exploration and spasmodic efforts at planting feeble colonies, Spain was pursuing a vigorous policy of conquest and colonization. That was the halcyon age of romance and adventure, and Spain led the van. The whole nation seemed imbued with a spirit of conquest. Imagination and romance peopled this vast unknown land with nations of strange civilization and amazing wealth; made it the repository of gold, pearls and precious gems in such fabulous quantity that the greatest riches of the known world seemed but the veriest dross in comparison; gave into its keeping the mythical fountain of youth; endowed it with all the beauties and wonders of earth, air and water the mind could conceive, and even located within its confines the Terrestrial Paradise from whose gates the angel of the Almighty had driven the great progenitors of mankind with a flaming sword of fire. Beyond this was the great South Sea with its thousands of islands, a region romance had filled with nations of Amazons and enriched with gold and pearls; while still further were the Indies, with its known treasures of silk and porcelain; the magnificent Cathay, that land of great cities and hoarded wealth of which Marco Polo had written, and the marvelous island of Cipango, whose treasures were ready to fall into the lap of him who was bold enough to seek them.

Stimulated by avarice, love of adventure and a religious zeal which often approached fanaticism, many of the nobles of Spain embarked upon expeditions of exploration and conquest, accompanied by bands of equally avaricious, adventuresome and fanatical soldiers, whose reward for their services consisted chiefly of the plunder obtained in their bloody campaigns. Such expeditions were fostered and encouraged by the Spanish monarch, who saw in them a means of extending his power and dominions and filling his treasury with the supposed wealth of the New World. Whoever discovered and conquered a new country in the name of the king was com-

missioned governor, or viceroy, of the subdued region, and granted all riches he might thus acquire, save only that which was to be the portion of the crown. By the middle of the sixteenth century Spain had conquered and colonized every portion of America inhabited by wealthy and semi-civilized nations, and was enjoying a revenue of almost fabulous amount from her provinces in the New World.

By this time Portugal had established a large and immensely profitable commerce with the Indies, by following the long route around the Cape of Good Hope. Spain viewed this with jealous eye, notwithstanding the enormous revenue she was already receiving from her possessions in the New World, and put forth great exertions to secure a footing for herself in the Indies. Several unsuccessful expeditions were dispatched across the Pacific from Mexico; but finally, in 1564, the Philippine Islands were subdued and taken possession of in the name of the Spanish monarch. In a few years an enormous revenue was derived from this new dependency. Her possessions in America formed not only an intermediate station as a base of operations, but furnished also the gold and silver with which to purchase the silks, porcelain and spices of the Orient. No other nation possessed such facilities for commerce in the Pacific, and no flag but that of Spain fluttered in the trade winds that sweep steadily across that mighty ocean. Not a ship of war cruised on its broad expanse to guard the commerce from hostile fleets. Annually the galleons sailed from Mexico with gold and silver, and returned laden with the precious products of the East, which were transported across the Isthmus to ships waiting to convey them to the mother country. The monarch of that powerful nation was the personification of arrogance. Over all lands even technically discovered by his subjects he claimed dominion and the exclusive right of trade, even if no settlement of any kind had been attempted. Foreigners of all nations were prohibited, under pain of death, from having any intercourse whatever with such territories, or from navigating the adjacent waters.

Spain was frequently involved in hostilities with her European neighbors, the great revenue derived from her possessions in the New World and her commerce with the Indies furnishing her the "sinews of war." Much as they desired it, her enemies were unable to attack her in this most vital part. Cargo after cargo crossed the Pacific and not a hostile sail was to be seen upon the bosom of the ocean. On the Atlantic side, however, things wore a different aspect. Armed fleets were necessary to protect her merchantmen from the men-of-war sent out to cut them off in times of national disputes, and from the piratical crafts that infested the West Indies at all seasons. These "freebooters," or "buccaneers," plied their piratical calling even in times of peace, with the full knowledge and even encouragement of their sovereigns. They sought diligently for the Northwest Passage. If they could only find some route into the Pacific other than the dangerous one by way of the Straits of Magellan, they could prey to their hearts' content upon